

Mark of a True Prophet

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the profound responsibilities and challenges of true prophets, emphasizing their role in delivering messages of judgment and restoration within the church and society.

Duration: 1:23:25

Scripture: Job 42:7

Topics: "Prophet"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the painful message of God's judgment and how people often reject both the message and the messenger. He gives an example of a church service where the focus on Israel's restoration seemed misguided, as there is still a time of trouble yet to be experienced. The speaker also shares his observations of people's postures and how it reveals their character. He emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of the weight, pain, and rejection that comes with the prophetic call, as opposed to the cheap and attractive portrayal of prophets in modern culture.

Transcript

...organization, and I think the Lord Himself. That's not to say that I've not been reading extensively and familiarizing myself with what I think the Lord wants us to consider. I've just been kept from organizing, from having something set, and just to find day by day how the Lord Himself will unfold.

So I'm looking forward to these times myself, for my own edification, aspects of things that pertain to the prophetic calling that I myself have never considered, but need to be considered, and finding that there's a rich literature on some of those things that I have not before tapped. So one of the blessings of our times together is to bring to your attention writers, theologians, scholars who have invested their life in this whole area, and I hope that you're not of a frame of mind that thinks that if something is intellectual or involves the mind that it's somehow unspiritual. I'm greatly appreciative of the labor of these scholars, and it opens up whole insight, as I trust you'll find today and in these days, that would have been lost to us except for their labor.

One of the remarkable anomalies of the faith is that the most intensive and insightful exploration of the Old Testament comes from German scholars, and it's a German scholar whose book I have before me now, Old Testament Theology, by Gerhard von Rath. It would be great to begin to develop a familiarity, and you might bump into one or more of their books in a used bookstore and be greatly benefited. How do you spell that last name, please? Von Rath, R-A-T-H, Gerhard von Rath.

I think he's gone on, but he was the, and probably still is recognized as the outstanding Old Testament scholar. When you begin to get into these men, they refer to each other and quote from each other's books, and so you find that there's a fraternity of German scholarship, and they'll sometimes invoke the names of others who are American or English, whose writings were also directed along the same lines of inquiry. Just once in a while, I'll stop and I'll just read you a footnote where they begin to cite their sources, and you'll be astonished how painstaking and exacting their work is.

Maybe that's the genius of German scholarship, is a mental stamina, mental and spiritual, to explore something thoroughly right through to the root. And their Hebraists, their knowledge of Hebrew as Germans exceeds that probably of most Jews. And so their thorough in their background, their knowledge of the original languages and so on, is a great blessing for us.

So Lord, we just ask your blessing again, right from the beginning as we get into the insight and the study of this precious scholar, and to stir us up, my God, in areas that we would not otherwise have considered. Bless this and make it fruitful for us, and we thank you for the work, the life's labor, the labor of love of men who poured themselves out in that kind of labor, Lord, that is so exhaustive, that is so innovating, more than anything that we could know physically. They have wrestled with the deep things of God, and we're grateful, my God, for their contribution.

Help us now to be the beneficiaries by your Spirit as we look into this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when we first mentioned the Prophetical School in the newsletter, we had no title.

And usually we don't ever give a title, because we don't ourselves know what it is that the Lord wants us to take up when we begin. But since the newsletter has gone out, in the weeks that followed, the Lord began to quicken Jeremiah. We found ourselves increasingly aligned with Jeremiah, who is the prophet of doom, but also the prophet of restoration.

The two great prophets who announced judgment for Israel, maybe three, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, are also the prophets of restoration. So it's a remarkable thing that the same ones who did not shrink from the painful requirement of having to announce impending doom, tragedy, devastation, expulsion for Israel, much against the protest and the opposition of the people of their own generation, was an unwelcome message, were the ones also to whom God gave the privilege of speaking of an eventual and final hope of restoration and return. And this is also our own burden and call.

I hope you don't think me dramatic in any way, but personally, I'm persona non grata, that means unwelcomed in Israel, by the Jewish believers, by the Messianic fellowships, because of a message that we bear, that is as unwelcome now, in the ears of this generation, as the message of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were to their generation, which is to say, the necessity for a soon coming devastation, probably eventuating in an expulsion from the land, a serious final chastisement or judgment of God for Israel, out of which a remnant will be sifted, who will be restored to the land and to God as the redeemed of the Lord, and open the establishment of the kingdom of God and the law going forth out of Zion, the word of the Lord, out of Jerusalem, that will affect all nations. This is the remarkable concluding drama of all the ages, is Israel's final restoration after a last day's time of the most serious tribulation that Israel has ever experienced in its entire history, which would include even the recent Nazi Holocaust. So we are speaking already, freely, as much as opportunity is given and the Lord prompts us, without stinting that there is a coming devastation for Israel.

Can you imagine how that would fall on the ears of those who have established their life there since 1948, in the hope that this is the completion and the fulfillment that would have long been hoped for, a national homeland, or the fulfillment of prophecy for the establishment of a nation. And I myself had once subscribed to that view, that over the more recent years, the Lord, by a process of things, not unlike the process by which he brought Jeremiah and other of his prophets into a growing awareness of judgment, he's done the same for us, until I see now and I believe without any hesitation that there must come these final judgments and chastisements, even to the possible destruction of the present state of Israel. It will no longer exist as a political entity.

And one thing that I'm required to make clear to those who will even allow us to share this, is that we need to distinguish between the state of Israel and Israel as a nation, because the nation will never be done in, will never lose its reality. But the state may well be something that will have to go in the course of God's judgment. So this is a painful message.

Any message on judgment is painful. And you can imagine why people stop their fingers in their ears and gnash their teeth upon those who bear it. Because invariably, the man is the message.

People cannot disassociate the message from the man. And if they reject the message, they must necessarily reject the man who brought it. In fact, the way to reject the message is to reject the man, is to find some disqualification in the man that would discredit the word, and therefore absolve those who hear the word from any obligation to believe it to be the word of the Lord.

So a prophet is subject to rejection, particularly if he bears the word of judgment. And so judgment is not only coming to Israel, it comes to the house of God first, it's coming to all nations. So whoever are the prophetic bearers of the word in those nations will necessarily experience a degree of rejection from within their own nation, and especially from the religious structure within that nation who wants to preserve itself as a self-perpetuating entity.

Nobody wants to consider a judgment that might include themselves and bring an end to their own involvement, their own work, their own purposes. In fact, the cry that I've heard most frequently from men in Israel when they hear what I'm about is, well, what about our ministry? It's as if, well, too bad about the nation, what about our ministry? This can't be solved because God has brought us and secretly, if not overtly, they believe that their ministry is the key to Israel's redemption. So these, to bring a word of judgment, how shall I say it, is an ultimate, final, total kind of responsibility that will grind most men to powder.

Most Christians have not the moral, spiritual stamina to bear the responsibility of bringing such a word. But what we're talking about is not only men who are called to bear it, but a church that is called to bear it. Because the church that is true church has of necessity a prophetic constituency.

The church is intended by God itself to be a prophetic entity and to be in the nation the voice of God of things that pertain to that nation's future and also how the nation must understand its own history as it affects its future. For nations are also under the judgment of God for the same reasons that Israel is under the judgment of God. So the church itself is called to a certain kind of stature, certain kind of growth.

And so I'm really appreciating this scholar's attention to the call of a prophet and some of the things that pertain to the prophetic call. And he talks about this call, and we can examine the call that came to Isaiah in Isaiah 6, where he cried out, Woe is me, I am undone. He saw the Lord high and lifted up.

And who shall go for us? Remember that? Send me. Jeremiah's call. And often the reaction of the prophets is, who am I that you should send me? Or I'm a child, I cannot speak.

Moses made that same excuse. So there's something about the call of the prophet that needs to be examined and how it comes, in God's own time, having nothing to do, that we can observe, with the man's necessary qualification. In fact, his qualification might be his disqualification, as Moses was 40 years in exile, having murdered an Egyptian in some attempt, humanly or religiously, to affect something for his own people.

So God never argued with Moses when he said, who am I that I should be sent? But once the call comes, something is set in motion of a radical kind that affects everything for the man himself. The scholar says, this created a totally new situation for the man concerned. It removed these men from all their previous mode of life for at least a considerable time.

It brings about a whole radical alteration in the life of the man who's called. Whether it's just for an immediate task, like Amos had certain things to proclaim, and then we don't hear more about him as prophet, but in Jeremiah the call was not just for a task, the call was for a lifetime. The call was for the man entire being for all his life, beyond just the task itself.

And it changes the whole mode of that man's life. From the very beginning, not only the prophet's lips, but also their whole lives were conscripted for special service. Because it's not just a voice that God is wanting to employ, but it's the whole man, the whole life of the man.

Because the man is so identified with his message, that God has got to invest himself in preparing that vessel in every way. So the called man is subject to a kind of refining and chastisement himself. How does he speak about the judgments of God abstractly or academically if he has not first himself in some measure experienced personally God's judgment and chastisement for himself? You see what I mean? So to be called to bear the message of judgment is to be made a candidate for judgment for yourself.

And no wonder that men shrink from the call. And as we'll see with Jeremiah, what makes Jeremiah extraordinary, he's the one prophet who gives us biographical details about himself and his response to his call and his complaint against God for the call, like as if he were seduced. That's the actual word that he uses and we'll look at it maybe today or tomorrow.

So it's a strenuous call, all demanding, and in fact you can almost sense that the prophet is free to reject it. It can't be conscripted where a man would come kicking and against his will. But there's a surrender of will and life to the totality of that call.

He goes on to say that the complete absence of any transitional stage between the two conditions is a special characteristic of the situation. There's no transition. There's no graduating.

There's no progressive thing. It's a radical what the man was before the call, what the man is since the call, and as a rule, as I've said before, what he was before is not a qualification. God did not choose him because he had an academic background or a theological degree.

God chose him because God will choose whom he will choose. So neither previous faith nor any other personal endowment has the slightest part to play in preparing a man who was called to stand before Jehovah, Yahweh, for his vocation. I think this is important because there's a lot of romanticization about prophetic calling.

This is one of the corruptive things taking place now, I believe, in the charismatic realm, is to romanticize the prophetic call as if these men have some special attribute or some mystique or something that would uniquely set them off from other men of flesh and blood. God is quite explicit in this scripture to say that these men are flesh and blood like as we. That's very important because if these men are extraordinary in some mystical way or have some previous qualification that other men do not have, then what shall we hope for in a church that is made up of flesh and blood men? You see what I mean? But there's something in man that likes to romanticize, especially the prophetic call.

And men who have taken this identification for themselves, who have not received the call that Isaiah or Jeremiah or others have but think they have in their romantic imagining, are the men most likely to be bizarre in their dress, in their personalities. They run off to Israel, they carry placards, they announce the day of doom, they wear long beards. There's something about the true prophet that is remarkably un-extraordinary, quite ordinary.

They are flesh and blood men like as we. In fact, if there's something extraordinary, I would be suspicious that this is not a man authentically called, but one affecting a prophetic demeanor that he thinks is appropriate and wants everyone to know that he in fact has it. Probably we would be more safe to say that the man who is wearing a three button, what do you call it? Three piece suit is more likely to be a candidate for the prophet than a man who is wearing a camel's hair garment.

Unless the Lord has explicitly, as with John the Baptist, called him to that. As a rule, the prophetic man is a man, is an ordinary man, and therefore he's subject to all of the liability, failure, sin of all men. And that must necessarily be so, because he's addressing all men and cannot speak to them from the place of some assumed spiritual superiority, but he's identified with them in their sin.

And probably one of the greatest statements of that is Daniel in chapter nine of his book, where he cries out to God and says, we have sinned against you. There's no way that Daniel disassociates himself from Israel. There's a complete identification with the sins of his people.

And later on when the angel comes to him as a messenger, your prayer was heard from the very first. I was delayed for three weeks because of some commotion in the heavenlies from the prince of Greece, the powers of the air, but your prayer was heard from the first. You're beloved of God.

And I would suggest that the reason is that God loved when the prophet identified himself with the sins of the people. He may not be a conspicuous sinner, but he knows himself to be a man and capable of all of the shortcoming and the failure of his own nation. And that is a necessary qualification if he's going to address the nation.

So these are ordinary men called to an extraordinary call. And the call itself, the nature of being a prophet, changes a man from ordinary to extraordinary. And we're going to go into that this morning.

And what a wonderful encouragement, therefore, for the church. The church is ordinary. It's too ordinary.

It needs to be extraordinary. And when it will perceive its own prophetic call corporately as the church and embrace it willingly and suffer the chastisements and the refinements of God to attain to it, it will become the extraordinary witness that God intended the church to be. The church that is not prophetic, in my opinion, is ipso facto not a church.

It's an institution. It's a cultural embellishment. It's something that provides services and benefits.

But church, in the sense of God's intention, must necessarily be a prophetic and apostolic entity. And it may well be that if it's not prophetic first, neither can it be apostolic, because the church is built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles. But when God says prophets and, he puts prophetic before apostolic.

And I think that there's a logic to that, that the prophetic thing must precede the apostolic. Maybe we'll talk about that later. But if we're not prophetic, neither can we be apostolic.

But the church that is the church is both. But it needs first to be prophetic before it can be apostolic. So what does that mean? What does it mean to be prophetic? If we have romanticized that word and embellished it and given it meanings that God never intended or see it in a way that we expect extraordinary characters, then the church is deceived about its own call and its own identity.

The meaning of that word is critical. What does it mean to be prophetic? And the way we'll understand it is by examining those men historically who were it, who have received this call, and their call has been legitimized or vindicated by history. Their words have come true.

Their books have spoken. They have shown the validity of their call. And so in going back into their life and their call, we can learn something about what God intends biblically as the meaning of prophetic.

And probably if we look into it, those things that are being celebrated today as prophetic, that are questionable, have very little biblical justification or explanation because they have not gone into the scripture. They have not read and examined the work of men who have given their lives to this study. And therefore they can go off on their own tangents and their own fanciful imaginings of what they think prophetic to be.

Usually if it's bizarre, if it's extraordinary, if it's way out, if it's outlandish, people think that to be prophetic. Or if it has a degree of prediction or can tell you something about your background. We're not talking about those things.

We're talking about an office, not a gift, not the gift of prophecy. We're talking about prophetic calling as an office. What that has meant historically, what God intends it to mean presently.

People talk about Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets, and maybe there is a New Testament prophet in some sense. But I think ironically as we come to the end of the age, if there's any glaring need, it's for prophets of the older kind, the prophets of the Old Testament kind who brought the oracles of God. What we need is not fortune tellers or men who can tell us that we have this name or that background or we have this need, but what is the heart and mind of God for this hour in the last days.

That's the oracle of God. The message that comes from the throne of God as a sent word to a sent man is what we need. So I wouldn't want to dismiss it by saying that was Old Testament.

That's classic, pervading through all generations, and we have as much a need for oracular, true prophetic statements that can only come through true men at the end of the age as we needed it at the commencement. In fact, the whole disjuncture between Old Testament and New Testament is itself false and has given us an erroneous picture of the faith. That could be a good subject for one of our evening get-togethers about the unbroken continuity of the one faith from the beginning as against the idea that the church is a new phenomenon that began on the day of Pentecost and that the Old Testament is relegated to the dustbin and that was the God of judgment and wrath and now we have the God of mercy and

kindness and like there's a rupture between old and new.

That's not the faith, that's not God. And one of our prophetic tasks is to restore to the church the sense of the faith as an unbroken continuum from the beginning to the end. So neither previous faith nor any other personal endowment had the slightest part to play in preparing a man who was called to stand before Yahweh for his vocation and we need to make a real point out of that.

It's entirely the chosenness of God. Amos was a vine dresser and a herdsman. He had no qualification.

Isaiah and Jeremiah were priests but that was not the qualification. That just happened to be their ancestral and hereditary calling. It gave them access and privy to certain things at the heart of their current Judaism but it was not the basis for their call.

The basis for the call is the sovereignty of God. Maybe we need to know who had that call or have resisted that call or have not recognized that call because we say to ourselves who are we that we should be called? I don't have the qualification. Well, there is no qualification other than the sovereign call of God himself.

The real question is if it has pleased God to choose you, are you pleased to accept it, knowing that prophetic calling is a synonym for suffering? And Gerhard von Raad uses the phrase the martyrdom of Jeremiah. The fact of the matter is that we don't know how Jeremiah died. He's not talking about what was Jeremiah's final demise in Egypt.

That's lost to history. We don't know. What he's saying is the whole life of the man was a martyrdom because once you're called and God has you in his grip and you've got to speak to things that are unpleasant for men to hear and that they're quick to reject, it's equally unpleasant for you.

Who likes rejection? It's a martyrdom. And so it may well be that historically there have been men who have rejected the call. We don't hear about them because they're not left behind a testimony.

But I think this scholar talks about the freedom of the prophet. Not only freedom in accepting the call, but freedom in continuing in the call. That every word that God subsequently gives, he's free to hear or to reject or to withhold from proclamation.

That is to say the prophet is always in a continual state of tension, of decision, freely chosen to act out what God has given him to speak. He can withhold it, he can swallow it down, he can spit it out, he can run from it, or he can express it. And even how he expresses it, there's a great element of freedom of choice in the manner of the expression when he does express it, which is to say that nothing gives us a more profound understanding of the issue of freedom in the life of a believer than as we see it brought into a particular focus in the call of a prophet.

And so if we apply that to the Church, nothing more enhances the Church than its freedom in accepting and rejecting its own call and its own obediences to God over a course of time. And freedom is the name of the game. Freedom is the making or the breaking.

Freedom to obey or to reject is the foundation for personality, for humanity, for distinction as a person. If you have no choice in the matter and you're just rubber stamping and you're being processed out of an assembly line, there's nothing there either for your own edification and ultimate glory or for God's. Freedom is a cardinal thing.

It's at the heart of propheticness and therefore at the heart of prophetic Church itself. So we'll have a better understanding of the Church's own call and the thing that will bring it to its own maturity as we explore the men who are the forerunners and are the thing in themselves. So we have to disabuse ourselves of all romantic notions of what we think propheticness is.

It may well be ironically that men who are trying to affect the becoming prophets are opposing authentic calls by trying themselves in some glamorous, eye-appealing, attention-getting way, the thing to which they're called, if they would only shut up and let go and not bring their own design to bear and let the Lord bring forth the fulfillment of his own call. That's true apostolically as well. Men opposing their own calling in their ignorance because they've not given adequate study to the way in which God calls and establishes his true servants.

So neither previous faith nor any other personal endowment had the slightest part to play in preparing a man who was called to stand before Jehovah for his vocation. He might by nature be a lover of peace, yet it might be laid upon him to threaten and reprove. Isn't that remarkable? That the man by his natural temperament has a disposition for those things that are peaceful.

He would have loved to have brought that kind of message. But no, God controverted his natural tendency and calls that same man who has an affinity for peace to bring the jarring, painful, and discordant message of judgment. And just the reverse might be true.

He'll take some guy who's hard-nosed and would love to take out the sword and give it free play and call that man to be like a mouse and to speak the kinds of things that don't thrill his own soul at all. I would expect that that, as a rule, would be God's procedure. He'll not be ruled by a man's natural disposition, but he will controvert it, all the more to show that he's the one who both calls and shapes and forms the messenger.

He might employ a natural propensity, but he's not going to be ruled by it. And Jeremiah was just such a one. I would suspect when you read about him and his complaint against God that if he had his choice in the matter, he would never have been an instrument to proclaim a message of doom, of impending judgment.

Nevertheless, God called him, and he was required again and again in freedom to speak it. Remember in Ezekiel 37, when God calls Ezekiel to speak to these dry bones that they might live, it's not only Ezekiel's faith in question whether those bones can live. In fact, he says, when the Lord said, Son of man, can these bones live? And Ezekiel said, Lord, thou knowest.

It's not only that he perhaps had not the faith to believe for it, but there's a good question whether he desired it. Maybe he was of a heart that Israel got what it deserved. It deserved its death.

They should not be restored from it. And he didn't want to have part in seeing them restored. Can you think of another prophet who exhibited exactly that? Jonah.

He didn't want Nineveh to come to repentance. It bugged him. He even had a controversy with God that why should they? I mean, they were horrific, and they had been the enemies of Israel.

He didn't want to be employed for their restoration. So talk about an illustration of the freedom of a prophet to balk from against the very call of God, and God's employment of a man contrary to his own natural aptitude and disposition can be seen in instances like that. So, so deep is the gulf which separates the

prophets from their past that none of their previous social relationships are carried over into the new way of life.

And Amos says, I was a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees, but Yahweh took me from following the flock and said to me, go prophesy against my people Israel. Notice the word, go prophesy against my people Israel. What a word.

We wouldn't have mind going to prophesy for Israel, bring them a word of encouragement that the Lord has seen their suffering and seen their distress, and now benefit is going to come and prosper, and now they will, no, prophesy against. When Isaiah got his call, seeing the Lord high and lifted up, he said, who shall go for, the Lord said, who shall go for us? And Isaiah said, send me. And what was the message that were to be sent? Speak, and so that their ears can be stopped and their hearts hardened that they should not believe.

Your word is not going to bring life and restoration, your word is going to bring judgment, but speak it. No wonder God had to say, who shall go for us? Who wants that? We want to go when it's gratifying, we want to go when men will be pleased and benefited and blessed and slap us on the back and say, oh brother, I so appreciated the word that you brought, it was life for me. But to have people shun you and turn from you as you speak despicable things is quite something else.

But I would say that God does not have the prophet until he is willing to speak whatever the Lord gives, whether it's a word that will bring judgment or a word that will bring blessing, because he's brought to a place where he's indifferent to whether he's going to experience rejection or approval. Can you imagine what kind of a place that is? How many of us have come to that place? And by what process shall we be brought to it? Because we're talking about the very foundations, the pit and the marrow of being a person. It's human, it's natural, it's registered in our corpuscles, in the very knit of our humanity to desire the approval of men.

To live without that and to suffer rejection has got to wither you and strike at the very foundations of your own identity, your own self-consciousness, your own confidence. It can destroy you if you need to be applauded and approved by men, as most human beings do. It's a rare person who can live without that approval and live without coming apart at the seams and all the while being haunted by the thought that maybe I'm wrong, maybe they're right, maybe this is not God's word, maybe I'm being too harsh, maybe they're right, that I am loveless and I am cruel and vindictive and enjoined.

That kind of a doubt is always operative and the prophet has got to eat that. So he's a man and he'll suffer doubt even about his own calling and his own obedience. And that's what Van Ryd means when he said Jeremiah, the martyrdom of Jeremiah.

It's a continual dying. So go prophesy against my people. This was more than simply a new profession, it was a totally new way of life to the extent that a call meant relinquishing normal social life and all the social and economic securities which this offered and changing over instead to a condition where a man had nothing to depend on or as we may put it, to a condition of dependence upon Jehovah or Yahweh and upon that security alone.

So if there's anyone who is completely dependent upon God, it's the prophetic man because he cannot look to man, he cannot look to his own nation, he can't even look to his own family, he can't even look to his own friends because as Jesus said, he's not without honor except in his own home and his own

country. The place where he needs it most is the place where he'll get it least. Someone said that I can take an insult from someone on the street, but when my own wife says the same thing, I'm shattered.

Or my own friend or my closest associate, but that's exactly where the prophet is likely to experience rejection and misunderstanding. Jesus did not obtain that in Nazareth and we're not likely to obtain it in the places where we are. So the prophet is cast upon God, not just for the receiving of the word that he's called to proclaim, but for the very sustenance of his own life, that he'll not sink in despondency and doubt, but that the Lord is his sustainer.

Jeremiah said in chapter 15, verse 17 of his book, because thy hand is upon me, I sit alone. Talk about freedom. If you know that, are you still willing to be called? All of us who want to be prophets? If you know that it's going to mean exclusion, being solitary, alone, rejected.

Because your hand is upon me, I sit alone. Are we still willing for that call? Because I do not sit blithely in the company of the merrymakers. Because your hand is upon me, I sit alone.

It's even being alone when you're in company. Everybody else is a merryman and they're having a blast, and it's amen and hallelujah, and they're enjoying the Lord, and you're sitting like a lump. You simply are not able to enter into their merriment.

Either it's false, it's superficial, it's carnal. Well, I'll give you a recent example from this trip from which I've just returned, a meeting in Pennsylvania, and I had to sit through all the choruses, and what an anguish. And every chorus was about Israel, and they were banging their tambourines.

The pastor and his wife were in the worship team, and every chorus was about Israel. And away go Israel, and finally when I got up I said, there's something foundationally wrong here. I've realized something tonight in hearing you that I've never understood before, and this is it.

That there's something flagrantly wrong in singing these choruses of Israel as if their restoration has already been effected, and as if there's not a trial and a time of unspeakable trouble that is yet to be experienced. How do we sing these merry choruses as if it's already taken, done? There's an unreality there to celebrate something before the time. It's a false celebration.

Well, they didn't know that there was a chastisement that is yet future. They thought it's all past. I know it, and so I'm sitting there and listening to the songs of merriment and celebration that I know is premature to sound.

And then when I got up, I expressed that there's something discordant here. There's something not right about singing choruses of celebration as if Israel is already through what is yet future for it. There's an unreality, and when there's an unreality with regard to Israel, there's a pervasive unreality with regard to everything.

Well, we were supposed to go out for coffee with the pastor and his wife after that service, and he came up to me and he said, Otter, please forgive us, but my wife is not feeling well and will not be going out with you. You better believe she was not feeling well. That woman was undone.

And I called the next day for one reason or another, and the man was so cursed and short and, yeah, not even a gracious word of thanks, Otter. You can see already that something was setting in, the recoil from the unwelcomed word that came, because I went on from that beginning to set forth the kinds of things

that Israel must necessarily experience as judgment that were yet future. And it was a painful contradiction of all that they understood and had been led to believe in one night, a complete, but my point is this, that I was sitting in the company of the merry-makers, but I was all alone, in the agitation of my own soul and the discomfort, to the point of anguish, of a pain that you cannot describe, because it's like a conflict between realities.

And either you are insane and they're right, or they are all wrong and you're the only one who knows it and the only one in a position to correct it. Got the picture? And I would suspect that that was only a faint first installment of what we can expect more and more as we come into these issues at the end of the age more jarringly. Before I had left for this trip, I had made an arrangement to speak at a Messianic congregation in Pittsburgh only a short distance from this meeting that I'm describing in Pennsylvania, but the brother canceled it even before I left for the trip.

There was a conflict of schedules or the summer and people would not be there. He probably has heard that odd, disbearing kind of word that might ruffle his congregation. So I swallowed it down.

He was a dear man. I knew him in Minneapolis and he loved my word when others, other oxen were being gored. It's one thing to love the prophetic man when he gores somebody else's ox, but when he begins to gore your ox, that's another story.

Somebody asked me about a brother whom we both know. He heard rumor that the relationship has been, you know, I had myself to bring a word in that brother's congregation of a kind that after I finished, he came up and said, this was the word of the Lord for the hot church. But when I got home, there was a three page or five page letter of condemnation from the same man over that same word.

And there was a rupture from that time to this day. There was a word that I had to bring from a brother with whom I had been in the closest relationship. We had lived together as immigrants in Israel and in New Jersey and so on.

And who loved, he was the first one to identify for me my prophetic calling. It was the same brother as we came back from Israel and traveled in the States and had meetings here and there. Thanks, Dan.

That he said, aren't you realize that yours is a prophetic calling? Really? Well, I'm just speaking what the Lord gives me. He was the first one to identify it. But when it came to his fellowship years later, and I had to act in that calling in a word that was against him and his interest, it was another story.

There are very few men who have the magnanimity to receive the prophetic word for themselves when it gores their own ox, when it stabs their own interest. That would be a man of God. And if I could just follow this out to the final logic, there have been other relationships that have been frayed and broken for this very self-same thing.

Simon was with me, Naomi's husband, when I had to deliver a word like this with my own publisher, who's a prophetic man, probably the most celebrated prophetic man in the nation today would not be an exaggeration. But when I had to speak a word that gored his ox, that was the beginning of the end of our relationship. Now, how is it that a man who had celebrated me as being personally one of the greatest, if not most significant influence in his own life, and acknowledges me in that office and call, should reject the word that comes through me when it would touch his interest? But he did.

Why didn't he more rather say, well, art has been consistently faithful in bringing the word of the Lord without let or hindrance, no matter which way the chips fell. And I should have a first obligation to consider that this is the Lord's word for us. How painful, though, it is.

And that's not the way that I see us. But I respect art. I know its history.

I have at least an obligation to consider that. An instant rejection with great vehemence that persists to this very day. The mayor was even going to bring me up on Matthew 18 charges for offending the body of Christ.

And this is a prophetic man. So this thing about sitting alone is no small thing. In fact, I said to this man, how is it that I'm not personally invited to these prophetic conferences when you prophetic men get together? Because I was operating in this call long before you ever began.

And he turned with complete candor and said, well, Artie said, the reason you're not invited is that you're not an in-house prophet. Can you get that? Do you know what an in-house prophet is? You're not one of the boys. You can't be counted to speak the kinds of things that we want to hear.

You're liable to say something that ruffles people or disturbs them. And in fact, not long after I spoke at another church in that area where we had a friendship with this pastor and the Lord just gave me a way of seeing things that night and that service, the worship of it. And I spoke out of Job and about Job's comforters.

And I said to these people, God condemned Job's comforters to pray for them, for the wrath of God was against them because they had not spoken as Job had spoken. But what they did speak is among the most eloquent, deep spiritual insight that's to be found in all the Holy Writ. And you don't even begin to approach it.

And that was the end of my talk. The man's wife came up to me that night as we were putting away our books. Reggie was with me.

And we felt like two turds. There's not a word to describe how you feel when you have upset the apple cart and have had to speak a word that for which you are instantly shunned, however long your friendship had been. That was it.

And there's a coolness. People just turn their shoulders from you. But the pastor's wife, whom I had observed over the years as a basically unhappy woman, Gray, came and said, thank you, Art.

That was reality. When you spoke tonight, she said, what's reality? She was the only one who came over to acknowledge it, was the woman who had been suffering a long distress for the want of it in her own husband and in his fellowship. So don't pass this by quickly.

Jeremiah said, I'm a lonely man in the crowd. And it's not just a crowd. It's a crowd making merry, having a blast, enjoying the Lord, amens and hallelujahs.

And you're the only one who somehow cannot rejoice with them. And you have to bear that strangeness. And if you have to speak out of that strangeness, you're going to sound a discordant note, where either they're going to break and say, this was the word of truth and we were in error, living in a fool's paradise, sounding things, amens and hallelujahs, that were unwarranted, or you're a freako and you need to be

rejected.

One of the two, most likely to be the latter. Only in one instance that I can remember where I had to bring an abrupt and discordant alternative to what was going on, is that people hesitate for a moment and then they broke before the Lord and said, that was the word of truth, that what you spoke was the description of the truth of our situation. Amen.

Who's, which one? Frankie. Frankie? And you'll never know with confidence or with any absoluteness, because you might very well miss it. And it's that tension that is martyrdom, that's part of the suffering, that however much you believe that it's the Lord, both the word and the expression, you have always to allow for the possibility that it might not be, that you've missed it.

So for example, I just got in, I wrote to the brother in Lithuania. I was sensing as we went on that he was increasingly unhappy with the presentations. I spoke five times.

And so I asked him on the internet recently, what was your evaluation now that those days are past? Well, frankly, we were disappointed. They published the book Spirit of Truth in Lithuanian and he thought I was going to speak on the subject of the Spirit of Truth. It would have served the purposes of their fellowship to have had a word of that kind.

Instead, all five messages were about the issue of Israel, her last days chastisement, her movement through the nations, her movement through Lithuania, because Lithuania and Poland, two countries where I were on that trip, are the most historically anti-Semitic nations of Europe. So this is a word that had to go into Lithuania and the church of Lithuania, which is where I was, 1400 people every night. And that the pastor himself, who was my interpreter, copped out by the third night.

He couldn't even bring himself to read the interpreter because his heart was not in it. It was not a kind of message that he was expecting or wanted. So I have to ask myself the question, did I miss it? I left men disappointed.

Or are they disappointed because they received something that didn't serve their purposes, they would have desired it, but nevertheless was a word that God wanted, and there'll not be another occasion when it will come. And I can't tell you for sure, you know, which of the two. You can believe that I was praying through those days and believing for the Lord and praying with the brother who was traveling with me, and spoke on each occasion what I felt was quickened in my spirit.

But it was universally on one subject only, Israel, her last day's chastisement, the role of the church as Israel is again in flight in the necessity for refuge and escape from persecution and Israel's restoration and the millennial blessing that will flow to all nations. It was not the word that they wanted. So in answer to your question, there's never a final certitude, never a final confidence, always the prospect of having missed the Lord and being responsible.

Freedom is responsibility and to know you're not going to get a second crack at this. This is once and for all. But I'll tell you what, I would be much more fearful today if I had spoken on the subject of the spirit of truth and blessed them out of their socks.

And then later on had the haunting thought, however blessed they were, they missed a one occasion that will not come again to speak a perception of the issue of Israel in the last days that very few men are bearing and that they're not likely to hear. And that Lithuania, like all nations, is scheduled for the

movement of Jews through it with a final historic opportunity to redeem all of the past and the mistreatment of Jews in Lithuania by the mercy that the nation would extend in one final time in Israel's last time of affliction. I would much rather err on the side of believing that was the word of the Lord than to have spoken the spirit of truth.

But there's always the tension. And I don't know that it's a tension that any other calling in God experiences. I don't think that a teacher, pastor, or evangelist has ever to groan and agonize through that kind of weight of responsibility that a prophetic man does, who's not just bringing a cutesy word but the oracles of God.

It has on top of that the frustration of bringing it through an interpreter in another language where the interpreter is not one with you in the spirit over that word. That's another agony, another suffering. So he says rightly, flesh and blood can only be forced into such a service.

At all events the prophets themselves felt that they had been compelled by stronger will than theirs. The early prophets only rarely mentioned these matters. The first to break the silence is Jeremiah.

One thing that's distinctive about Jeremiah is he's biographical. He talks about his calling, he talks about the call of God, and he talks about his response to it as a complaint. And that's in the chapter 20 in verse 7, if anybody wants to turn to that, where he complains to God, Thou didst deceive me and I let myself be deceived.

By the way, please read the book of Jeremiah, particularly the first 25 chapters. And also look again at the last chapters of Deuteronomy, 28-32, because Jeremiah was Deuteronomic in his whole understanding of the faith. His whole understanding.

He called Israel to repentance on the basis of Deuteronomy. He saw Israel's coming judgment on the basis of what was written in Deuteronomy. So we need to know what is the background of the prophet's understanding.

What enables him to interpret and understand the crisis of his nation and to foresee that there's going to be judgment? It's not because the Lord has necessarily told him in detail. It's something that grows in the understanding of the man himself theologically. Which, by the way, is how I have come to my own understanding of Israel's coming judgments.

I have heard the voice of the Lord. The Lord has given me expressed things in times past. But this most profound message that we're now bearing, which is the greatest responsibility that we have ever had, and there's not going to be a message that will exceed it, did not come through revelation.

In the sense that the Lord wakened me at night, or there was a presence in the room, or the room was filled with light, or the Lord filled my soul with the word. It was a growing perception theologically of a truth and a realization of what was ahead for Israel in the light of scripture. And that is foundationally true for the prophets of God.

The Lord is not just stamping upon them some message outside of their own comprehension, but rather these are men who have a theological grasp. They grow into something and then when the word of the Lord comes, it's in perfect keeping with what they have already come to understand. It's not in opposition.

So that these prophets are theologically minded, they're biblically based. The thing that distinguishes them is that they interpret the present crisis of the nation and its future in the light of the past according to the word. It's not just some mystical process where they are just neutral instruments waiting for a flash of revelation and then they speak it.

Revelations come, thus sayeth the Lord comes, but there's also the preparation of the man in his own understanding. He's not a mindless non-entity. He's a man immersed in the word of God, particularly when God has spoken of judgment and Deuteronomy is foundational.

And then he sees the application for the nation and warns them on the basis of their own scripture. Now on this trip I was in Warsaw, Poland, where the Jewish community was, there was a greater loss of Jewish life in Poland than any other nation in Europe. Of the six million Jews that were exterminated, a half of them came from Poland alone.

And the one uprising against the Nazis in which Jews were involved was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The church where I spoke was built on the ruins, so to speak, of the Warsaw Ghetto as well, geographically in that spot. And the pastor took me at my request to the Jewish cemetery and some of the monuments, there were people who died at that Warsaw Ghetto, but also all the history of the Jewish community in Warsaw, remarkable tombs that had not been destroyed, tombstones.

And when I came out, there was a young man sitting on a bench by the entrance with earrings. I can't remember, he had a nose ring, but certainly he had a share of earrings, curly hair, you know, he had a hairdo. He was from Minneapolis.

He just graduated college, got a degree in psychology. And I said, and he's an Orthodox Jew and he's going from there to Israel with a Jewish group. I said, you know what the Bible says about Jews perforating their skin? It's an abomination to the God of Israel.

All he said, that was olden times. This is now another time. This is modern times.

He could not see the connection between what God said in times past with this present time. And that is basically the mindset and the condition of men in general. So for a prophet to bring a word of impending judgment for the future to a people who have lost all connection with the past is not the least of the weight of his problems.

How do you take the past and the words of the past and cogently bring them into the consciousness of a people who are mindless about the past and think that there's no correspondence as we are now required to do? And in the Holocaust book, which we have published, what we're saying is that there's a coming judgment in the light of what God says in the past and that you're under a covenantal obligation of curse. The fact that you have lost all consciousness of covenant as modern Jews does not absolve you from the curses proclaimed in that covenant to which your fathers gave agreement. Imagine telling that to modern Jews.

We just got a letter a couple of weeks ago from a leading Jewish dignitary from a Bible society in Jerusalem to whom I had sent the book. And it was a devastating lambasting. Your intellectual presumption, you're this, you're that, you're a traitor, you're a, you're a, one insult after another.

And he's the head of a Bible society, but he could not understand the correspondence with what was being said about Israel's future in the light of what is spoken in the Bible in the past. So the prophet has

the uncanny responsibility to bring to the present consciousness of those whom he's addressing, the reality, the abiding reality and unchanging truth of God's spoken word as it applies now or will apply. That is to say the whole force of culture and the spirit and the mentality of that society is opposed to his perspective.

No wonder he's a freak. No wonder he's out of joint. No wonder he's out of time.

He's a man living in the past and for him that past is viable because God is the same yesterday, today and forever. That word is unchanging and he lives in that reality and has to address the people who do not. So his word has got to bridge the disjuncture between past and present.

And so as to prepare people for an impending future. What a responsibility, what a weight, what kind of a word must that be? And yet he's a man. And can there be such a word independent of what the man himself is? Is he some disembodied spirit? Is he some instrumentality that God can bring that word through him no matter what his own condition is? No.

The man and the message, inseparable. The character and the speaking, inseparable. And that's why God has got to deal ruthlessly in the shaping of the character and life of the man or men who will bear such words for their generation.

That's why we're seeing all of the sleazy, cheeky, dramatic, melodramatic, romantic play on prophets now because it has nothing of the weight that we're discussing, nothing of the death, nothing of the pain, nothing of the anguish of soul, nothing of the rejection, loneliness, the separation, the misunderstanding that is intrinsic to this call. It's all made glib, cheap, quick, attractive. Everybody is it.

They're all prophets. Go to their schools and you can become it. So I'm grateful for the opportunity.

I need this myself to be reminded. And I'm grateful for Gerhard von Rath, a German, and his scholarship and his probing raises these great questions that needs again to be considered. And I'll repeat it.

I hope you'll bear with it. Not just for the individuals who have the calling, but for the church that, if it's to be church, must have this come into its own consciousness, for it is its call. It has got to be, in society, able to bear rejection, able to be abrasive, able to be in disjuncture with the contemporary culture, with its mores, with the things that the society and the world values.

It's in opposition. It's in greater reality in the past than it is with contemporary things. It's not at home in the world.

It's more at home in the biblical world. It's more comfortable with the Israel of old and the Bible and the God of Deuteronomy than it is with present culture and the dream world and the movies and all the junk that's going on. It's out of joint now.

And it's calling people out of that unreality to the reality that is timeless and established by God and his word. That's the church's responsibility and call. So it's a good question of where our reality is.

Where's our reality grounded? Reality is the name of the game. And to have your reality established in scripture, particularly Old Testament scripture, Deuteronomy, the Psalms and the Prophets, is to condemn yourself to being a weirdo and to being out of joint with the time and with the age. And yet to say that that is the definitive reality and that what purports to be reality is false is not only to be an offense but an insult

and a threat to the present establishment whether it's religious or secular.

And then the sparks will begin to fly. Then you're no longer just a harmless curio. You're a threat to men who want to retain this unreality as reality.

So we've got to be grounded in something that's timeless and eternal against every opposition to it. In the culture, the air we breathe, the whole nature of things. So Jeremiah complains, thou didst deceive me, I let myself be deceived.

In other words, I allowed you to give me the call when I didn't realize what it was going to mean in full. And now that I'm seeing it, I'm complaining, you deceived me, you didn't tell me the whole thing from the beginning or I may not have accepted it. But which of us have ever been told the whole thing from the beginning? We wouldn't know how to understand it and we would run from it.

And Amos said, the lion has roared, who is not afraid? The Lord Yahweh has spoken, who does not prophesy? That was an answer to a critic who was holding Amos to task. After all, he was only a herdsman and one who dealt with trees. And Amos is saying, how can I help myself? God has roared.

Who shall not prophesy? How can I withhold this word, seeing that God has roared, the spirit of God has amplified something and this word must necessarily come. The prophet refuses to allow his prophecy to be called in question in this way. What he says is in no sense the product of reflection or personal resolve.

It is something which bears witness to itself. And so it's not unlike some conscious reflex action, which even the person concerned cannot himself explain. Was he able to follow that? The prophet does not allow his prophecy to be called into question.

In other words, what Amos is saying is, this is not my word, the Lord has roared. I'm just expressing what God is sounding and that word will validate itself. It's not something that's borne out of my subjectivity or my desire and that the prophet is aware that the Lord is the author of that statement and that it's not just a matter of his own reflection.

It seems like a contradiction. Two minutes ago I'm talking about the prophet reflecting on the scriptures and growing in his own theological understanding. But when the word comes, he knows it's the word of the Lord.

It's in keeping with what he has been brought to understand, but it's not coming out of that understanding. He's not saying it because I've come to this conclusion and now that the Lord has given me liberty and that that word is the Lord's word. It's something which bears witness to itself and not just a reflex action, which the person cannot himself explain.

So the fact that Jehovah claimed not only the prophet's lips, but also his eyes for the service of his new task was of prime importance. The purpose of the vision was to impart knowledge, not knowledge of higher worlds. It was intended to open the prophet's eyes to coming events which were not only of a spiritual sort, but were also to be concrete realities in the objective world.

So here, Van Raad is going from the prophet who can hear the word of God and speak it to the prophet who is being schooled to see as God would have him to see. Not mystical apparitions or revelatory things of a mystical kind, but the same realities that others are looking at, but seeing them not as others sees them, but as God sees them. And that is true seeing and that's the seeing that the prophet has had to

communicate.

So what dear heart Van Raad is saying, God not only has the prophet's ear, he has the prophet's eyes. The whole man, lock, stock and barrel is the possession of the Lord. He's not even allowed to see by his own seeing.

And you'll notice that sometimes. I've been told that a brother humorously has said, you have the discernment of a fence post. How come you don't see what everybody else is seeing? I don't see it.

I'll only see it when the Lord gives it for me to see. And for that same man, God has given me to see about him and his situation and fellowship in a way that it doesn't even begin to occur to him to consider painful insights into the unreality of his own life and his own fellowship by the same man who has rebuked me for having the discernment of a fence post because I didn't see what everybody else is seeing. So the prophet is schooled.

He is a way of seeing in and through things that others do not see. I don't know whether I'm made that way, but I'm very visual, very graphic. I notice when I'm driving with my mother, whether it's her age or she's just not cut out of the same cloth, I have to direct her attention.

Did you see this? Look at those sheep. I'm continually observing as I'm driving, and I'm continually observing just about every time. Or I'll see something.

My wife will show some video from her visit to Israel, and she's panning the womb, but my eye falls on a young man and his posture in a slouch, and right away it speaks to me volumes. I have an understanding of the arrogance of that man and a kind of conceit that he's not saying or doing anything, but I see. So this is what this author is speaking about, how God has the whole man, not only his ear, but also his eyes, but not in the mystical sense that he's seeing apparitions, although that occasionally comes of special views of distant and mystical things, but more properly, he sees the things that are actual, that are before everyone, but he sees them in a way that others do not see.

Maybe he'll hear things in a way that others do not hear. I had a recent episode where a woman was visiting here with her husband, who had not been baptized in water, and I was commending that she should be. She had a baptism in the spirit, and she thought that to be baptized in the spirit subsumes all baptisms.

I said, no, this is foundational. Israel passed through the cloud and through the water. There's a baptism in spirit and in the water.

And so she turned to another person in the room and said, did you know that, that there's a difference between water baptism and spirit baptism? And that person said, I don't care. And when I heard that, a chill went into my soul. That person was not only saying I don't care about the issue of baptism, what they were saying was, I don't care, period, about the things of God, about the faith, about this whole spiritual walk.

That's what I was hearing. That's what my spirit was picking up in that same phrase. For the others, it was the person saying, I don't care about the issues of baptism.

For me it was, I don't care about the issues of faith. I don't care about God himself. So it's that kind of hearing and that kind of seeing that is the distinctive of the prophetic man.

And therefore, how much greater is his responsibility? What will he do with that hearing and with that seeing? Is he going to make it the object of gossip? Is he going to come against that person? How will he use it? It's also the issue of his freedom. Remember we talked about in the prayer time, not only what we say but what we withhold is the issue of our freedom and our maturity. So this prophetic man who is given this particular seeing and particular hearing has got to come under a very particular obedience to God.

He can't be moved by the disposition of his own soul or any advantage that would come to him by employing or using insights that come. He has the responsibility to hold it or to speak it with discretion at an appropriate time or just to make it the matter of his own prayer and intercession. But these are responsibilities of an acute kind that most Christians do not know.

What I'm saying is all Christians are called to know if the church is to be prophetic. So that to say that when the church is prophetic, the church comes into the greater freedom and the greater responsibility. It becomes the church.

It becomes larger than life. But we need to see this in individuals to know what God is intending corporately. And that's what Jesus did.

He exhibited in his own person, in his earthly tenure, what is intended as a model for the whole church corporately. I wonder if that was Paul's prayer or intention when he prayed in Ephesians about coming into full stature in that prophetic manifestation of Christ in his full exalted state of being in reality. Which Paul wasn't himself.

What he's really praying is that the church would come into the same kind of reality that he himself knows, that same fullness. You guys need a break? It's ten to ten. Let's take a ten minute break and then we'll come back for another hour before lunch.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/2/SID2460.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/art-katz/mark-of-a-true-prophet/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net